

v.53, no. 6 (Dec 2002)

# SACRED JOURNEY



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THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ DECEMBER 2002

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# SACRED JOURNEY<sup>®</sup>

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

*The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is*

*to encourage and support*

*a spiritual orientation to life,*

*to promote the practice of*

*prayer,*


*meditation,*

*and service to others,*

*and to help bring about*

*a deeper spirit of unity*

*among humankind.*



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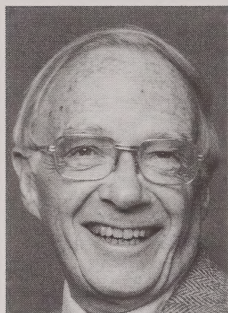
# C O N T E N T S

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Cover photo by Abraham Menashe

## PEACE AND JOY TO YOU



To pray without ceasing—with words, with silence, with what Brother David Steindl-Rast calls a steady state of prayerfulness—makes not only Christmas day but the whole holiday season a time of joy and peace.

In fact, a world at peace can come about only when each of us nurtures and acts from a peaceful heart, however obscured and burdened it is by fear and suffering. But perhaps in this season we can set aside fear:

Peace I leave you  
My peace I give unto you;  
not as the world gives,  
give I unto you.  
Let not your heart  
be troubled,  
neither let it be afraid.

*John 14:27*

Let nothing disturb you,  
Let nothing dismay you.  
All things pass.  
God never changes.  
Patience attains  
all that it strives for.  
He who has God  
finds he lacks nothing.  
God alone suffices.

*St. Teresa of Avila*

Peace is the world's most wished for present:

May the blessing of God  
rest upon you.  
May his peace abide with you.  
May his presence illuminate  
your heart  
Now and forevermore.

~*Sufi Blessing*

Deep peace  
of the running wave to you,  
Deep peace  
of the quiet earth to you,  
Deep peace  
of the flowing air to you,  
Deep peace  
of the shining star to you.

~*Gaelic Blessing*

What can we give in return? The poet Christina Rossetti writes in her beautiful poem/prayer, *Nativity*:

What shall I give him  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd  
I would bring a lamb;

If I were a wise man  
I would do my part;  
Yet what can I give him—  
Give my heart.

At the end of the day, with hearts full of love and compassion, we might wish to offer up the following prayer by St. Augustine:

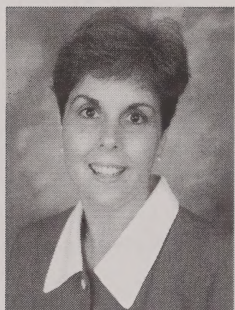
Watch, dear Lord,  
With those who wake, or watch or weep tonight,  
and give your angels charge over those who sleep.  
Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ,  
rest your weary ones.  
Bless your dying ones.  
Soothe your suffering ones.  
Pity your afflicted ones.  
Shield your joyous ones.  
And all for your love's sake,  
Amen.

This Christmas remember these Hindu words of wisdom:  
"One of the best ways to worship God is simply to be happy."

May you and all beings enjoy a peaceful and happy holiday season!



## WINTER FLOWERS



Life hands us all winter flowers—unexpected blessings that seem so incongruently out of season. Once in a cold season, when I was worn out by sickness and fear, my then five-year-old daughter trudged outside and found a hidden bloom in an otherwise frozen backyard. She plucked it with a mittened

hand, carried it inside, taped it to a white sheet of paper and carefully spelled out my name: r-e-b-e-c-c-a and drew a heart with her crayons. Graciously given, love can erase gloom and inspire belief that good remains in hard or confusing seasons.

This month's feature interview with Joan Brown Campbell, the driving force behind The Abrahamic Program at the Chautauqua Institution, was conducted by contributing writer Garnette Arledge. Shortly after the interview Garnette and I met to discuss it, and only hours later, Garnette's roommate was killed in a car accident. A lovely, gentle life was snuffed out by a careless driver. In this time of loss, I asked Garnette if she would like to delay the interview. But no, she said, "Thank the Goodness that I have this project to work on, anchoring me in what I love to do." Work was for her one of those unexpected blessings to provide roots in a time of crisis.

Rose Tillemans, a frequent contributor to *SACRED JOURNEY*,



died in June. This tiny Catholic sister was known as a giant among souls for her advocacy for the poor and homeless of Minneapolis. Her article "Three Epiphanies," shows her ability to see the beauty in everyone she met.

"On the Art of Charity" by Alice O. Howell focuses on the need to pass on the love that one has been given. "It's hard" she says to become "the proverbial poor family." How much freedom comes when one learns that today's gift of charity is just a downpayment on what we can later give to another.

In *Spirituality & Everyday Life*, Joni Woelfel finds a stranger in a store to be the purveyor of optimism that she needs in a time of crushing grief. In *A Transforming Experience*, Mary Beth O'Brien finds the courage to change her life one winter's day. *Pilgrimage* takes us to Jerusalem at twilight as God's many and varied people pause to pray.

As a special gift this month, we offer *A String and a Prayer*—a look at how the world's faith traditions use beads as tangible helps to prayer. Find a string and finger along.

Maryanne Hannan reviews a lovely book, *Befriending Life: Encounters with Henri Nouwen*. Read it and see if this may be the perfect gift for a friend this holiday season.

Artist Andrew Wyeth once said, "I prefer winter and fall, when you feel the bone structure in the landscape—the loneliness of it—the dead feeling of winter. Something waits beneath it—the whole story doesn't show."

As winter settles in be on the lookout for the rest of the story. You may stumble upon a winter flower, an unexpected word of encouragement, or see a way to give something away for the joy of passing on what you've received. Unexpected blessings have reached us all in hard times; remember that and pass some along.

## Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell



# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



## Take a Risk for Peace

The Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell

Interview conducted by Garnette Arledge

*This past summer, I walked back in time through the tranquil leafy arches of New York State's legendary Chautauqua Institution. Chautauqua, founded in 1873 by two Methodist Episcopal ministers for Sunday school teachers' summer training, quickly became the premier adult education center. Soon they published group home study courses and sent out lecturers bringing authors, explorers, musicians and political leaders to the highways and byways of America from 1912 until the 1920's when radio then television replaced live performances.*

*Today at the Chautauqua Institution, the ethos remains quaint but the issues it tackles are decidedly for the twenty-first century. Attendees were vitally interested in addressing brokenness, bitterness and violence, especially that resulting from religious or spiritual insularity.*

*Chautauqua is a gated-village complete with farmer's market, small buses, restaurants and one modest drug store on the shore of an eighteen-mile long lake. Of its 1200 dwellings, the majority are private Victorian cottages, many with casual arrangements of vivid gladiolas like banners on tiny front porches.*



*The week I visited Chautauqua was devoted to "Paths of Transformation," an exploration of the three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as sources of transformation and peace. In addition, a Sikh led daily morning meditations on centering prayer and a Bahai lecture, Unity healing services, and drum and fire circles were offered.*

*During the week, I sat down with Joan Brown Campbell. After reading of her many accomplishments, I imagined her to be efficient and articulate. What I was not prepared for was the delightful expression of welcome in her eyes and her ease as we settled into facing comfortable couches.*

*The Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell is the Director of the Department of Religion at the Chautauqua Institution. In 1999 Campbell left her position as General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ (NCC) in the USA, where she was chief executive officer and official spokesperson. Chautauqua's vision for building friendships among Jews, Christians, and Muslims enticed her out of retirement.*

*For five decades she has played active roles in ecumenical activities, civil rights, Vietnam and South Africa reconciliation efforts, but many people remember her most as the woman seen hugging and speaking out for Elian Gonzalez, the six-year-old rescued at sea after his Cuban mother died attempting to reach the U.S. Bitter relations between his family in Florida's Cuban exile community and his father in Castro's Cuba resulted in court appeals, armed intervention, and the eventual return of the boy to Cuba. Dr. Campbell used her considerable force of character and strength of mind to sort through the inflamed passions and advocate for the rights of this one small child.*

*Dr. Campbell is an ordained Elder in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the American Baptist Churches. For more information on Chautauqua visit their website at [www.chautauqua-inst.org](http://www.chautauqua-inst.org).*



**SACRED JOURNEY:** Can you give us an update on Elian Gonzalez? After he returned to Cuba have you stayed in contact with him?

**Joan Brown Campbell:** Yes, I spent last Christmas with my daughter and son and their families in Cuba. We spent a day and a half with Elian and his family. They showed us the museum that documents his story, and we went swimming together. Elian was the first to run right into the water. I was glad to see he had no fear of the water from that time alone on the water by himself. He has a picture of his mother by his bed in his room. He called her 'My beautiful mother' in Spanish. He said, 'She died.' He seems to have accepted her death. When I see him now, I see a happy child, a mischievous eight-year-old. I know he's not scared. He's happy.

**Under your leadership, the Chautauqua Institution began the Abrahamic Program bringing together Jews, Christians, and Muslims to talk about how religious faiths address contemporary issues. What surprising things have you personally learned from these interactions?**

Religion at its best is transformative, but religion is far from always at its best, and at its worst, religion is a disaster. When religion goes fundamentalist or extremist, it can be very destructive. Religion can be a force for good or a force for ill in almost equal measures. When I hear scholars from Islam presenting their religion at its highest, its very best, I understand why American Christians and Jews ask, 'How then did it go so wrong?' But if you asked me as a Christian minister to present my faith, not my personal faith, but Christianity, I would present its best

face also. Yet it is very understandable when others want to challenge Christianity and ask: How about the Holocaust, the Inquisition, and the Crusades? How do such terrible things arise from a religion you say teaches love as the most excellent way?

I think every religion is burdened with extremism. September 11 was so horrific that we feel we must demand an explanation, but what if we took that energy and turned it to work for peace? I don't think of myself as a Pollyanna. I think of myself as a realist but the negative energies around these issues are also horrific. It's as though people do not think it is worth listening to another person unless you immediately focus on the negative aspects of the event or faiths.

**Are you saying we should avoid asking hard questions of each other's religion?**

I say we should take care with our questions. Don't ask 'gotcha questions!' The best questions won't scare us but will help us to see how events or beliefs look to people of other faiths. A question like, 'If as a Christian I believe in the Trinity, therefore to you that makes me an infidel, will I be murdered for that?' is a question so loaded with bias that it can't be answered well. I think we should ask the hard questions, the provocative questions, but not the mean or biased questions.

**You have eight grandchildren. What kind of world do you hope to leave them?**

My grandchildren are important to me. Have you met my two-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter? She's out on the porch saying, 'Hello, my name is Sarah.' When she came to us at ten months from a Chinese orphanage,

abandoned by her birth parents, she was withdrawn. Now look at her!

I want a world where we have come some way toward peace. I am very fearful my children and grandchildren will not have that. I think we face dangerous possibilities. I am very, very worried by the militarism, the revenge thinking I often see and hear today. Jesus Christ said, “All things are possible for those who believe.” Yet I know there is always a twist in his parables. All things are possible is both a command and a burden. I cannot say, you cannot say, something is ‘not in my job description, not my responsibility.’ If you really believe that all things are possible—and I believe peace is possible—then we must face the responsibility to search for the possibilities.

**That sounds like your motto: All things are possible for those who believe.**

Why yes, I would be willing to say that. I have taken the risks to believe and act like all things are possible. Yet sometimes by taking risks we get very hurt.

I have also learned that success is transitional. For instance, an interim minister is charged with the task of stirring the pot, to find who and what are hurting in a congregation, and lead them to addressing these hurts so they can move into a better future. I celebrated my 70th birthday this year, and if my health holds as it is, I will continue to make a contribution, to stir the pot for peace.

As Huston Smith once said, “We listen to the faith of others because our times require it. Those who listen work for peace, a peace built on mutual awareness and concern.”

Let me say it again: Those who listen work for peace.

# SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY



## Three Epiphanies

Rose Tillemans



A strong looking, stocky man with sad, intelligent eyes appeared in the Peace House door the morning of December 24. I'd never met him before. He wore plain, neat clothes like many of the homeless men who come to our street oasis every day. It was nearly meditation time, so I invited him to move into our circle. We went around with names as usual. When our visitor's turn came he said in a soft, rich voice, "I am Issa, and I was born in Bethlehem." A quiet awe settled over the room. We had never before been visited by anyone from Bethlehem and on Christmas Eve Day!

That morning our theme was: How might Jesus appear if he came this year? Next to me sat an Ojibwe woman trying

*Sister Rose Tillemans was the founder of Peace House, an urban refuge for homeless persons in Minneapolis, MN. A frequent contributor to SACRED JOURNEY, Rose died on July 5, 2002 at the age of 79. In a tribute to her in the Minneapolis Star Tribune columnist Doug Grow writes, "She wasn't even 5 feet tall and probably didn't weigh more than 80 pounds, yet could there have been a tougher person in town than the gentle Sister Rose Tillemans?" A community leader from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, the religious order to which Sister Rose belonged, called her "a prophet, calling us to serve the dear neighbor." She was known to all as a feisty lover of peace and people. The world will miss her. Another wonderful Christmas article by Sister Rose, "Savoring the Holy," is available on our website, [www.sacredjourney.org](http://www.sacredjourney.org).*



to quiet her baby grandson. The child was usually so bright and happy, but that day he wailed a lot—seemed fussy and unsettled. Juggling the baby, the grandmother spoke, “I think Jesus would look like my father. He would have a strong voice for our people and restore our dignity.”

Others only had seen pictures of Jesus as a tall, fair-skinned thin man with pink cheeks and long, wavy hair. Ruby commented: “Way back in Sunday School our teacher showed us pictures of the Baby Jesus at Christmas time. He was lying in a manger with his plump little arms reaching out. He had golden curls and a circle of light around his head. He just lay there in that straw so perfect. Us black kids couldn’t figure it out.”

Issa from Bethlehem listened with interest to the discussion. “I’m quite dark-skinned but Jesus might have even been darker than I,” he added. “But his skin color, how he came to be, where he was born are not the important things. It was his *message*, his example, what he said and did. He was all of us. We are all one.” Issa swept out his arms to include all in the room. We pondered his words. After meditation and lunch he offered to do the dishes with two suburban women guests. I heard them laughing and chatting with each other in the kitchen. One woman slipped a ten-dollar bill to Issa when the work was done. He nodded to them graciously, put the bill in his pocket, slipped into his jacket and quietly headed out into the snow.

Who was this man who came to us on Christmas Eve? Will he ever return?

After supper in my apartment that Christmas Eve, I decided to go to St. Stephen’s Shelter to be with some of my Peace House friends who would be staying overnight there. I waited in front of my building for the bus. No

stars in the sky. Even on Franklin Avenue, hardly a car on the street. The snow piled on the elm branches near me spoke, "hush, hush." My bus inched slowly toward my stop. I boarded carefully, dropped in my coins and settled in behind the driver. When I looked around I saw only three other passengers.

"Miz Rose, Miz Rose, is that you?" An attractive young woman sitting toward the back got up and moved toward me. "I'm Sasha, remember? Peace House paid my rent about five years ago. I've been doing so good." I told her I was glad about that. "But you're drinking, Sasha. I thought you had ..." She interrupted, "A person has to have a little fun on Christmas Eve, Miz Rose. Where are you going?" I told her.

*What do  
I say to  
this  
homeless  
man?*

When it was time for me to get off, she jumped off and followed me down the steps. "I'll walk you to the shelter so you won't slip," she assured me. "It's dark out." She took my arm and with a reverent gentleness—a gracious tenderness, accompanied me to St. Stephen's.

At the door I asked Sasha, "Where are you headed tonight?" She responded cheerfully, "Oh, I'm going to meet a friend at a motel." I knew what she was about and felt sad. This was her way of supporting her family—the same as five years ago, I mused. Sasha disappeared into the dark of this Christmas Eve.

As I stepped inside I recalled Jesus' words to the chief priests and elders, "I assure you that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you" (Matthew 24:31).

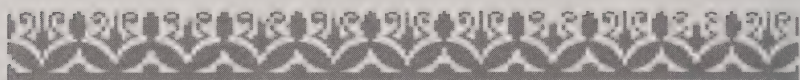
The men in the shelter were restless, edgy, moving from

their bunks to the snack table—then outside for a last smoke before the door was locked. I visited with several. A boom box blared the Rudolph song. A young man handed me his new poem. “Silent Night, Holy Night, Nothing calm. Nothing bright. In this shelter there is no child. Everybody is nearly wild.” I nodded. What does one say to a homeless man on Christmas Eve?

After an hour I headed for the door to catch my bus going east. Billy, a dear man who comes to Peace House was standing outside on the top step. He told me he hadn’t pulled the right number that would get him a bed inside. “Where are you going?” he asked me with a concerned expression. I told him. Billy tossed his cigarette into the snow and stepped on it. He was a little high. We at Peace House knew he was a drug dealer, but so kind to everyone. “I’m going to walk you to the bus. It’s too dark and slippery for you to be out alone.” He grabbed my arm firmly, and we hurried down the walk, reaching the stop just as the bus pulled up. I stepped in and turned back to thank Billy. “I hope you’ll find a bed somewhere,” I called to him. “Don’t worry, Rose,” he answered, “I’m like Jesus. I got nowhere to lay my head” (Matthew 8:20).

The bus door swung shut, and we jerked ahead. I sat down and removed my steamed-up glasses. Some frozen tears were stuck to the lenses.

# SPIRITUALITY & SERVICE



## On the Art of Charity

Alice O. Howell

Many years ago I worked as a social secretary for the wife of the U.S. Ambassador to Cuba, Emery May Norweb. She was a very wealthy and generous woman. After I had married my first husband, an impecunious and gifted artist so dedicated to his art that he refused to get a job, we had two children and no place to live. Finding a small house became imperative, as continuing in the cold water flat in Little Italy in New York City was no longer practical. We found a small development house bordering a potato field on Long Island, but we did not have the down payment of \$700.

Emery May came to the rescue, and in subsequent years, remembered us and the four children we eventually had with gift certificates every Easter and Christmas that enabled me to buy them decent clothes on sale. Time passed, and despite the valiant efforts of my husband, the fortunes of our family worsened. We lost the equity in our house and despite my finding a job teaching school, we were falling deeper and deeper into despair.

Christmas was coming and to my amazement we became the proverbial poor family chosen to receive a free

*Alice O. Howell is author of The Dove in the Stone and The Beejum Book. She lives in Massachusetts.*



turkey from the church. Not only that, but the wealthy parents of one of my students appeared at our door with their children bearing gifts for my children.

Looking back, I realize how mixed my emotions were. I, who had been brought up in fine hotels and boarding schools in Europe, had come to this! I was conscious even at that moment of being grateful for the generosity, but I was also humiliated by the state of things, and furious, I confess, at my husband for allowing us to reach such a low point.

The doorbell rang and a ham was delivered—a Christmas gift from Emery May. I telephoned her in tears, protesting her endless generosity and my total inability to ever repay her.

“Alice,” she said, “Listen carefully. As you know, I have been blessed in this life. I do not want repayment, but when you are able to do something for someone else, just think of me and that will be payment enough.”

I was able to put her remarkable injunction to work at once. Since we already had the turkey, I walked down the street to a neighbor, Jeanie, a recent widow with six children, including two sets of twins. Her husband had just been murdered. She received the ham with precisely the same mixture of emotions that I had experienced. Then I applied Emery May’s advice and told her exactly what I had been told. Her eyes shone with gratitude.

The following day I found out that Jeanie, in turn, had cut the ham in two and taken a half to her neighbor, a distraught young mother of four whose husband was at sea. The two women had not spoken to each other for several months because of a spat over the kids, and thus, it was an occasion for mutual comforting. The spirit of Christmas was made manifest.

Now, many years later, I realize that Emery May's hidden gift was that of an implied confidence that my predicament was a temporary one and that she had full confidence that someday I, too, could be generous without offending or being patronizing—the worst of all things! Thus, the kindness and wisdom of this woman has lived on and enriched me and others with a beautiful demonstration of love in action. It is my prayer that in writing this I let her gift keep on giving.

# P R A Y E R S



## Creator of All

Arlene Swanson

Creator of all,  
We confess we are slow in learning to love one another.  
Awaken us, now, to know all humans as sister and brother.  
Open our minds to find ways to demonstrate our caring.  
Open our hearts to creative ways of communicating love.  
We, who have known Your love, ask You to teach us  
What it means to be children of one family. Amen.

## Help Us Not to Despise

William Penn

O God, help us not to despise  
or oppose what we do not understand.

*Arlene Swanson and Kathy Lindbloom are members of Flying Dinosaurs, a group devoted to praying for peace. William Penn, a seventeenth-century Quaker, founded the colony of Pennsylvania. The Vedic prayer is from The Gift of Prayer: A Treasury of Personal Prayer from the World's Spiritual Traditions. Our October 2001 issue reprinted A Blessing of Solitude in our PRAYERS section. A reader wrote to let us know it was written by John O'Donohue and appears in the book Anam Cara. We appreciate all help in identifying sources so we may give credit where it is due.*

# Help Me God

Kathy Lindbloom

Chaos and terror circle the world.

Give me the wisdom to know how to help.

Give me the strength to transcend the demands of my daily life  
to find the time to do more than pray.

Help me to take action to root out causes of unrest  
to feed the hungry  
to bring justice to all.

With your help and guidance, I will take the steps I can to help  
my brothers and sisters in all corners of the world  
understand that we are one.

Help me God!

## Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!

from The Vedas

May there be peace in heaven,

may there be peace in the skies,

May there be peace on earth,

may there be peace in the waters,

May there be peace in the plants,

may there be peace in the trees,

May we find peace in all the divine powers,

may we find peace in the supreme Lord,

May we all be in peace,

may that peace be mine.



# SPIRITUALITY & EVERYDAY LIFE

## Expect Great Things

Joni Woelfel

*No eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
Nor the human heart conceived,  
What God has prepared for those  
who love him.*

~1 Corinthians 2:9a

Coincidences, chance encounters, messages from unlikely people. How little we pay attention to these forgotten avenues through which God reaches out to us. When we have lost a loved one, as we grieve and process our loss, there comes a day when our hearts heal enough to notice the world around us again. We have new eyes and ears with which to understand the revelations of love, life and God—with new capabilities we never thought could be possible for us. Through the spiritual art of ‘paying attention’ the world gradually comes alive again—brimming with promise, comfort, guidance and messages.



*Joni Woelfel is a frequent contributor to SACRED JOURNEY who lives in Minnesota. This excerpt is from Meditations for Survivors of Suicide, © 2002 by Catholic Book Publishing. Used with permission of the publisher Resurrection Press, an imprint of Catholic Book Publishing Co., Totowa, NJ 07512. To order call 1-800-892-6657. Joni also maintains a website [www.aplaceofflight.com](http://www.aplaceofflight.com) for family and friends of those who have committed suicide.*

This was illustrated powerfully one Christmas holiday for my husband and me: There we were, doing last minute shopping in a local town. The night was magical—blustery and windy enough to sway the giant evergreen swags strung across the streets, causing the lights to blink and ribbons to rustle. Exhausted holiday shoppers sped down the street, collars upturned, and no one looked too happy. My husband and I, in our own private world of grief—the kind that feels like a sob just below the surface while you’re smiling on the outside—went about the business of finding just the right gift for the right person on our rather lengthy list.

Finally, nearly done, we had time for just one more shop before the stores closed. As we walked into the brightly lit, pine-scented store, a trendy-looking elderly woman in a red parka with snow-white hair caught my eye and we nodded hello. Intensely focused on my list, I immediately forgot about her. My husband, however, ended up in line at the cash register with her, holding all the merchandise I was buying. He immediately struck up a conversation and I could hear them talking. She was saying, “. . . so, I was talking to God the other day about my big mouth, and God said, ‘So what—you gotta say what needs to be said,’” while my husband, who loves outspoken, eccentric people, chuckled. She was very attuned to him and he ended up telling her that we’d lost a son to suicide. By now, the young clerk and other customers were also listening closely. Expressing heartfelt sympathy, the elderly woman told my husband how sorry she was and praised him for going back to college and recreating his life.

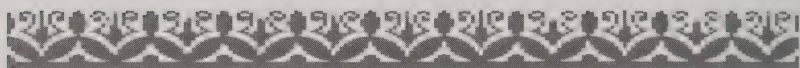
The solicitous clerk rang up our purchases, and as we said Merry Christmas to the elderly woman and walked

out of the store, she called, “Expect great things!” Out on the sidewalk, I caught my husband’s arm, and thoroughly struck by what the woman said, jested, “Did we just encounter an angel on earth?” For someone to tell us—parents who had lost a child to suicide—to expect great things seemed utterly preposterous. But why did it feel so right, needed, and heavenly to hear?

The next day, the prophetic message seemed to echo in my mind. I could not forget it. Taking a pen, I tenderly scrawled the words on a sheet of paper and taped them to our sliding glass door. Then, my husband and I went forward in our lives, helping each other and others to believe it, one day at a time.

*God Who Speaks through Earth Angels,  
you remind us every day:  
despite our pain,  
you promise us great comfort for our hearts,  
great love in our lives  
and glad tidings which will bring us great joy  
not only on Christmas morning,  
but all our lives through.*

# A T R A N S F O R M I N G E X P E R I E N C E



## December Rose

Mary Beth O'Brien

From a very early age I knew my life was sacred. I knew that all life was connected; animals, plants, and people. And knowing that made me feel safe. I knew there was a whole other dimension that, although I couldn't see it, I could feel it. That, too, made me feel safe. Then I grew up and forgot what I knew.

With age came less understanding. I learned to doubt things I once believed so surely. I began to experience fear. I lost all hope and confidence in myself and others. I had little tolerance, even less patience and found myself without the capacity to understand or forgive.

In my early twenties I was five months pregnant and saying "I Do," when I knew in my heart, I didn't. When my second child arrived, I was so deeply buried in angst I couldn't hear myself scream. I worked like a dog, only managing to live from hand to mouth and life seemed endless. I looked into the faces of my children and instead of seeing amazing grace, I saw two mouths to feed. I cried on my way to work and I cried on my way home. I

*Mary Beth O'Brien lives in New Jersey.*



cried because I was angry at the choices I had made and because I felt sorry for myself. I could feel my life force seeping out of me and I felt hopeless in stopping it.

I read several books to my children every night, not because I was a good mother, but so I could pretend to fall asleep and remain with them rather than returning to the bed I shared with a man I didn't love. I wasn't living. I was hiding. I hid from my husband, my family, and myself. And when I thought things could not get any worse, my grandmother died.

It was early December and the day she died a terrible winter storm hit the entire East Coast. My family teased that my grandmother was making her grand exit.

My grandmother's death was more than I could take. She was the only person in my life who made me feel special and I couldn't bear the thought of living my life without her. She always was there for me and even in death she did not abandon me.

One week after her funeral, I was on my way home from work when I noticed a pink rose on a vine. This rose was unlike any other rose. First of all, it was a December rose, something I had never seen. And, it was absolutely beautiful. Soft pink petals gently curled on the edges resting on a snow-powdered vine. It called to me, the rose, whispering softly so that no one else could hear. All I could do was stare at this amazing vision. I was enchanted, no longer aware of the cold, stark air swirling around me nor the gray sky that ominously hung over me. I was at peace. This rose was like an old friend I hadn't seen in years, whose mere presence brought a sense of comfort and nostalgia.

I leaned in and breathed in its fragrance. It smelled of kindness, sweet and gentle. I took off my glove and

reached out to lightly brush my finger against its soft petals and felt what I thought was a snowflake hit the back of my hand but soon realized it was a tear. Suddenly, I became aware of my grandmother. I believe she had conspired with the universe to reach me in a way only she would know how and by doing so, she made me aware of my own deep sadness. Until that moment, I had no idea.

As I continued to gaze upon this miracle of nature, I knew this merciful and tender flower was

*Remember  
your own  
beauty  
and  
vulnerability.*

nudging me to remember my own beauty and uniqueness at the same time it symbolized my vulnerability. My grandmother brought me this rose to remind me of the limited amount of time I have to make my life count for something. It showed me it was possible for me to climb out of the depression I had designed for myself with self-pity

and self-loathing and enjoy the wonder and magic life offered me each and every day. It whispered to me that no matter how bleak things appeared, there was something magnificent waiting just ahead.

I don't know how long I stood there spiritually conversing with the rose, but it was dark when I finally continued on my journey home. As I walked I became aware that something was different. I was different. I had discovered the little girl I once was hiding in the woman I had always dreamed of becoming.

I went home, gathered up my children and smothered them in kisses as gentle and real as rose petals.

Soon after, I left my husband because life was too precious to waste any more time where I didn't belong. I no longer wanted to blame him or anyone else for my unhappiness. My life was just that, mine.

I started to remember all that I had forgotten and I began to learn and experience so much more. I've become a kinder, more gentle person who believes that tolerance, forgiveness, and present moment awareness are the keys essential to a life well lived.

And forever in my mind is the memory of a beautiful rose sitting on a snow-covered vine on a cold, December day. That gift changed my life and made me whole again.

# I L L U M I N A T I O N S



We must be the change we wish to see in the world.

*~Mahatma Gandhi*

When, before the beauty of a sunset or a mountain, you pause and exclaim, 'Ah,' you are participating in divinity.

*~Joseph Campbell*

So here is my little nugget of gospel truth for you to take home.  
The truth is not that it is going to be alright,  
the truth is, it already is.

*~Fredric Evans*

When people have to go through really deep sorrow, when something of the fundamentals of their lives is destroyed, they feel as if they walk and live under a great glass bowl. They see and hear other people, but they seem separated from them by an intense pain that others, even the most sympathetic, cannot feel. But if love works its great miracle, it reaches through the invisible wall. You do not forget what you lost, but sometimes you think that now for the first time you feel the innermost reality and beauty of joy, the creative power which comes to you out of it. . . . Suffering and joy are in a miraculous way connected with each other in this world of God.

*~Emil Fuchs*



God is in the prepositions—  
beyond, among, within,  
beneath.

*~Sharon Daloz Parks*

The ways to God are many.  
They appear when we are ready for them,  
and when our faithfulness has shown  
we can live with the consequences  
of further growth.

*~John Punshon*

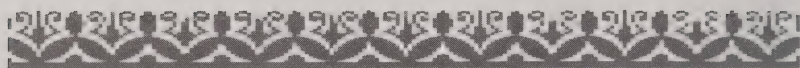
Faith is certainly not to be tied up in a tight parcel of "I believes."  
It is a path along which I have to walk into further truth.

*~Damaris Parker-Rhodes*

Anyone who has probed the inner life, who has sat in silence long enough to experience the stillness of the mind behind its apparent noise, is faced with mystery. Apart from all the outer attractions of life in the world, there exists at the center of human consciousness something quite satisfying and beautiful in itself, a beauty without features. The mystery is not so much that these two dimensions exist—an outer world and the mystery of the inner world—but that we are suspended between them, as a space in which both worlds meet . . . as if the human being is the meeting point, the threshold between two worlds.

*~Kabir Helminski*

# PILGRIMAGE



## Jerusalem Encounter

Bronia Galmitz Gallon

*Jerusalem: the city which miraculously  
transforms man into pilgrim; no one can  
enter it and go away unchanged.*

~Elie Wiesel

*A Beggar in Jerusalem*

As a member of a kibbutz bent upon building a Jewish homeland, I left my entire family in Poland and arrived in Palestine in the spring of 1936. Before settling in, I wanted to see the country. My first destination was Jerusalem, city of my dreams. For days I walked the narrow streets of the Old City, fascinated by the pageantry of its people, the cacophony of languages, the fragrant, spiced air.

On one of my journeys I ventured out of the city and into the nearby Judean hills, where I stumbled upon an Arab cafe in an unlikely setting—the rooftop of a Russian convent. The tiny cafe was hemmed in by a sun-baked clay balustrade with garlands of grapevines running along its edge. Customers sat at low, brass tables, sipping

*Reprinted from Chicken Soup for the Jewish Soul. Bronia Galmitz Gallon was born in Russia, raised in Poland and pioneered in Israel. She married and moved to the United States in 1946. This book is available from booksellers and more information is available from Heath Communications, Inc. or at the website of Dov Peretz Elkins, the volume's editor: [www.dpelkins.com](http://www.dpelkins.com).*

coffee and talking in subdued tones.

The sun was glinting on the sparkling brass of the table where I sat down. When I lifted my eyes to look beyond the balustrade, Jerusalem lay stretched out beneath me, from the rectangular buildings, broad boulevards and blooming gardens of Rehavia, the modern section, to the Old City with its shadowed streets winding in and out of ancient gates.

I could hardly believe my eyes. There in the distance rose the stone walls of the Tower of David. Down to the left stood the Wailing Wall, its stones polished by tears. The Wailing Wall, whose fissures hid a people's heart wrapped in a prayer, held a two-thousand-year history of longing for self-determination. Out of the ruins of the last Temple, out of that Wailing Wall, grew the Mosque of Omar, its graceful splendor consecrated to the worship of Allah. The golden dome shimmered in the sun as my eyes wandered from its mosaic gateway to fall on the Via Dolorosa.

I closed my eyes and let my thoughts sink into the past. The memory of thousands of years of suffering swelled into a sea, engulfing me. When I turned to the present, Nazism and Communism were competing with each other for the degradation of humanity. The world was far from being at peace on that beautiful afternoon.

The sun was beginning to set behind the stark hills, and a golden haze embraced Jerusalem. A bell chimed, another answered in a deeper tone, and a third rang out on a higher pitch. The bells intertwined, their silvery tones brushing against the hills and returning in muted echoes. I had the sensation of being suspended between the ages.

Twilight is short in Palestine, and the scenery was changing rapidly. Lights began to glow on the horizon.

Up on a minaret balcony, a white figure appeared, turning slowly in all directions. The *muezzin* was calling his people to worship. Wherever they stood, Moslems rolled out their rugs and knelt, joining the caller in the evening prayer.

The lights went on in a nearby synagogue. The rabbi and a group of students were walking up the steps into the house of prayer.

The Franciscan Brothers turned on the lights in their house of worship, preparing for vespers.

A sweet voice emerged from the Yemenite synagogue. It was the song of the *hakam*, chanting a prayer.

A lilting soprano floated out of the English church, not far in the distance, and was soon joined by others.

Prayers rang out in Hebrew, Latin, Russian, English, Arabic. The earth stood still in deep meditation. Then, like a whisper, I felt my heart stir. Adding my voice to the chorus, I began to chant my prayer.

"And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and they shall not learn war any more."

A great calm began to envelop me, and all my bitterness melted away. A new love was being born in me. I could see the oneness of all people and all religions. I was at peace.

That encounter with Jerusalem sustains my hope for universal peace to this day. Whenever the world is in turmoil, whenever I am about to lose my faith in humanity, I summon the memory of Jerusalem's evening prayer.





*Robert Scheer*

# WAYS OF PRAYER



## A String and a Prayer: The History of Prayer Beads

Eleanor Wiley and  
Maggie Oman Shannon

*To use beads with a prayer, Indian or Moslem or Christian,  
is to en flesh the words, make thought tangible.*

*~Madeleine L'Engle,  
The Summer of the Great-Grandmother*

Beads as instruments of prayer have been an important fixture of most spiritual traditions for centuries. And most of the world's inhabitants—nearly two-thirds of the planet's population—pray with beads. Some scholars have theorized that counting prayers naturally evolved from the abacus, the Chinese counting instrument that also used beads. Others have noted that records of the third century Desert Mothers and Fathers indicate that they carried in their pockets a specified number of pebbles, which they dropped one by one on the ground as they said each of their prayers.

*Adapted from A String and a Prayer: How to Make and Use Prayer Beads © 2002 Eleanor Wiley and Maggie Oman Shannon. Used by permission of Red/Wheel/Weiser. Books are available from booksellers or by contacting the publisher by phone at 800-423-7087 or online at [www.redwheelweiser.com](http://www.redwheelweiser.com).*

## The Religious Use of Beads

Traditionally, prayer beads have consisted of strings of similarly sized beads, seeds, knots, or even rose petals and beads made from crushed roses, from which we get the word “rosary.” The Sanskrit term *japa-mala* means “muttering chaplet,” which refers to prayer beads’ function as a means of recording the number of prayers muttered. Since counting prayers was initially so important, each religion embracing the use of prayer beads developed its own symbolic structure to follow.

In addition to helping keep one’s place in structured prayers, prayer beads also symbolize the commitment to spiritual life. With their circular form, a string represents the interconnectedness of all who pray. Each bead counted is an individual prayer or mantra, and the rote repetition of prayers and mantras is meant to facilitate a sole focus on the prayer or mantra itself.

### Hinduism

Most scholars believe that the use of prayer beads originated in ancient India with the Hindus. In India, sandstone representations dating from 185 B.C. show people holding prayer beads, and this practice apparently became widespread by the eighth century B.C. The strand of Hindu prayer beads, called a mala, was designed for wear around the neck, and consisted of 108 beads for repeating mantras or counting one’s breath, a practice later adopted by Buddhists. (The word *mala* means “rose” or “garland” in Sanskrit.) The earliest known mala—strung from seeds that still exist—is around two thousand years old.

## Buddhism

Around five hundred B.C. India saw the birth of Buddhism. As Buddhism spread to Tibet, China, and Japan, so did mala use. While Burmese Buddhist monks prefer strings of black lacquered beads, malas are also made of sandalwood, seeds, stones, or inlaid animal bone. Twenty-seven-bead smaller wrist malas were created to prevent the prayer beads from touching the ground during prostrations.

In Tibet, malas of inlaid bone originally included the skeleton parts of holy men, to remind their users to live lives worthy of the next level of enlightenment. Today's bone malas are made of yak bone, which is sometimes inlaid with turquoise and coral. Buddhists also used their prayer beads as divination tools as well as for prayer.

## Christianity

Christian prayer beads, most recognizable as the Catholic rosary, are usually made of colored glass or plastic beads, or sometimes beads crafted of olive wood. Although, as noted earlier, there are roots to the prayer practices of the Desert Mothers and Fathers in the third century, their use was more widely developed in the sixth century. Then, Saint Benedict of Nursia asked his disciples to pray the 150 Psalms of the Bible at least once a week. Since this was a large assignment for the memory, a substitution of 150 *Paters* ("Our Fathers") was allowed. The faithful used beads to count the *paters*, and this string of 150 beads became known as a *paternoster*.

The person widely believed to have introduced prayer beads as Christians know them today is Saint



Dominic, after he had a visitation by the Blessed Virgin Mary. And Thomas of Contimpre first called them a rosary, from the word *rosarium* or “rose garden,” since the faithful used strung rose petals and beads made of crushed rose petals to count prayers. When using a rosary—which is divided into groups of ten beads, called decades—in traditional practice, a Catholic repeats the “Our Father” and “Hail Mary” prayers as he or she marks off the beads while meditating on the life of Jesus and Mary.

In Eastern Orthodox tradition, both knots and beads are used. Shorter knotted ropes are worn on the wrist. Sometimes the faithful use bead strands resembling a ladder (each end of a bead touching two parallel strands), which signifies the soul making its ascent to heaven.

Christian prayer beads have been associated primarily with Roman Catholicism or with the Greek and Roman Orthodox tradition, because John Calvin discouraged their use by Protestant believers. He rejected materialism and ritual, feeling that the faithful should read and analyze spiritual texts in direct relationship with God, rather than simply memorize set prayers.

However, in the late 1980s, an Episcopalian priest created an Anglican rosary of thirty-three beads, which represent the years of Jesus’ earthly life. There’s also a nondenominational variation known as the “Earth Rosary.” Consisting of four sets of thirteen beads, which indicate the thirteen weeks in each of the four seasons, the Earth Rosary has a total of fifty-two beads, representing each week of the year.

Like their secular counterparts, “worry beads,” prayer beads offer a kinesthetic comfort—they are a means in the material world to remember one’s place in the spiritual

world. As M. Basil Pennington reminds us in *Praying by Hand: Rediscovering the Rosary as a Way of Prayer*, prayer beads are a method or instrument “to help us pray, to enter into communion and union with God. Therefore, we should feel free to use it or pray it in any way that helps us enter into that union.”



Kristina Brendel

## Islam

Prayer beads are also used by Muslims. No one knows exactly when or how prayer beads entered this faith tradition, although scholars believe that prayer-bead use in Islam was adopted from Buddhism. Muslims use strings of thirty-three or ninety-nine beads with one “leader” bead, which represent the ninety-nine names of Allah found in the Koran and the one essential name. Called *masbaha* or *subha*—from the Arabic word meaning “to praise”—Muslim prayer beads include markers after the thirty-third and sixty-sixth beads. Often *subha* are made of wood, or from date pits produced in the Islamic holy city of Mecca.

## Judaism

In Judaism, prayer beads have been considered a form of paganism. However, because the Jewish prayer shawl known as the *tallit* includes a specified number of knots, we can perhaps intuit that numbers are as spiritually significant to the tallit in Judaism as they are to prayer beads in other traditions.

Made of blue and white silk and featuring fringe, five knots, and four tassels, the tallit indicates obedience to a passage in Numbers 15:37-41. In it, Moses asks that the tallit be made and looked at, specifically noting the number of tassels to include “so you will remember all the commands of the Lord.”

Given the religious significance that beads have held around the world, we can trust the significant precedent their spiritual power holds for our own lives. We invite you to think about creating your own prayer beads as something to do in addition to, not instead of, any current practice you may have.

## BOOKS WE'VE ENJOYED



**Befriending Life: Encounters with Henri Nouwen** edited by Beth Porter with Susan M. S. Brown and Philip Coulter. Image Books, 2001. Reviewed by Maryanne Hannan.

*Befriending Life:* Encounters with Henri Nouwen is dedicated “to all those for whom Henri Nouwen’s ministry and writing have been a source of life.” The editors might have extended the dedication to all those for whom his life has been a source of mystery, for this anthology of forty-two personal recollections sheds a great deal of light on the gifted, enigmatic priest.

The growing fascination with the personality and peccadilloes of Henri, as all the contributors call him, is rooted in the recognition that the man was part of the message. Long-time friends Bart and Patricia Gavigan note the paradox: “Henri preached urgently and often the central Christian truth of the incarnation, yet he himself was spectacularly ill at ease in his body.” Still, they say, “For Henri, the heroic task of spiritual beings trying to live embodied lives was at the very core of theology.”

Several contributors mention his large hands and exuberant gestures. Bob Massie, a friend dating from Henri’s tenure at Yale, refers to his hands as a “ten-member liturgical dance corps.” Others mention that he could be downright annoying at times. But most people write of how profound their interaction with him was, how differently they

*Maryanne Hannan is a poet living in upstate New York.*



perceived life as a result of his friendship. The repetition in the various accounts from all different perspectives, from people who knew him at Notre Dame and the Menninger Foundation when he first came to the United States, through his tenure at Yale and Harvard Divinity Schools, and his ministry at L'Arche Daybreak in Toronto, Canada, all come together to present a realistic portrait of an unusual character. The essays and interviews are arranged without any obvious order, but incrementally, artfully, the man emerges.

Contributors were asked to faithfully record Henri as they remembered him, rather than to eulogize him. This is a great boon. As a result, some of the personal agonies, the loneliness and betrayals that Henri confessed to in his prolific spiritual writings, now make sense. Nathan Ball's essay, "A Covenant of Friendship," with its painfully acquired understanding of Henri is invaluable. Seeing Henri in the role of suffering servant, he writes: "His own personal suffering, often triggered by feelings of rejection, isolation, or abandonment, was equally large. I came to see his capacity to suffer as an expression of his unusual human capacity."

Dealing with some of the same material, Peter Naus concludes in his incisive essay, "A Man of Creative Contradictions," that Henri's "personal tragedy was his gift to others."

But what about the joy of life Henri embodied? That too is fully represented in this collection, with many instances given of his celebration of liturgy, his ability to turn life's tragedies into moments of grace. Jean Vanier writes at length about Henri's love of Eucharist, noting "Because the Eucharist was of such significance to him, he had a natural talent for making it meaningful, for showing its connectedness to our lives." Mary Bastedo recollects his first

Christmas at L'Arche with candles everywhere and him moving "excitedly about, his vestments brushing against the flames," to the dismay of their community leader, "a stickler about fire safety."

Details such as these, preserved in this collection, bring Henri alive for those who have not had the privilege to meet him. And interspersed throughout the book are excerpts from his own writing which serve as a powerful incentive to read or reread his books. Clearly, Father Henri Nouwen was a living testimony to the gospel message he wrote and preached: that God loved us in our brokenness.

As I read the contributions, though, I wondered which one would have delighted him most and based on what everyone else said about him, I am tempted to make a guess. Gordon Henry is a core member of L'Arche who sometimes accompanied Henri on his tours. In the interview he gave for this book, Gordon said, "I find it a little bit hard now. I wish Henri would be here to tell stories about me."

That, I guess, would be Henri's message as well. It is not about Henri; it is about Gordon and all God's children.

## POETRY



### Softly, White and Pure

Dorothy R. Fulton

In stillness, I wait.  
Within the calm lies the  
expectant tension that is  
prelude to a snowfall.

Then, softly, white and pure,  
peace settles on my soul,  
erasing imperfections,  
uniting me with others,  
like a snow blanket blotting out  
boundaries until  
road and tree and house are one.

*Dorothy R. Fulton is a professional church musician and a life member of the Hymn Society of the U.S. and Canada. She lives in Pennsylvania.*

# Gifts

John Grey

First,  
You show me the light  
like a stairway.  
Then you give me  
each day  
like rungs to climb.

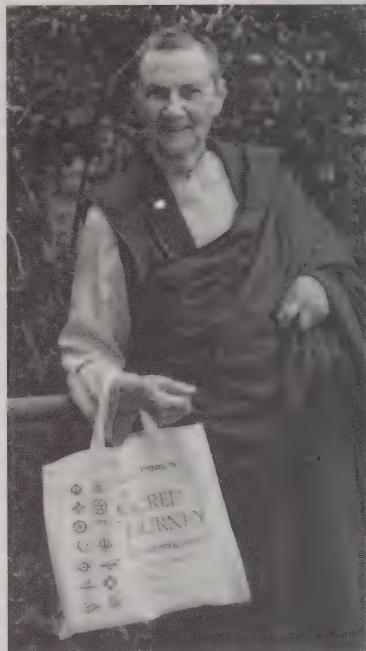
*John Grey is a poet from Rhode Island. His work has appeared in Weber Studies, South Carolina Review, Osiris, and Passages North.*





Mary Julia Kephart

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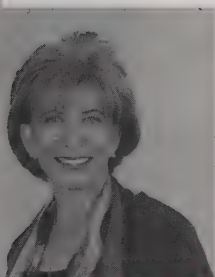
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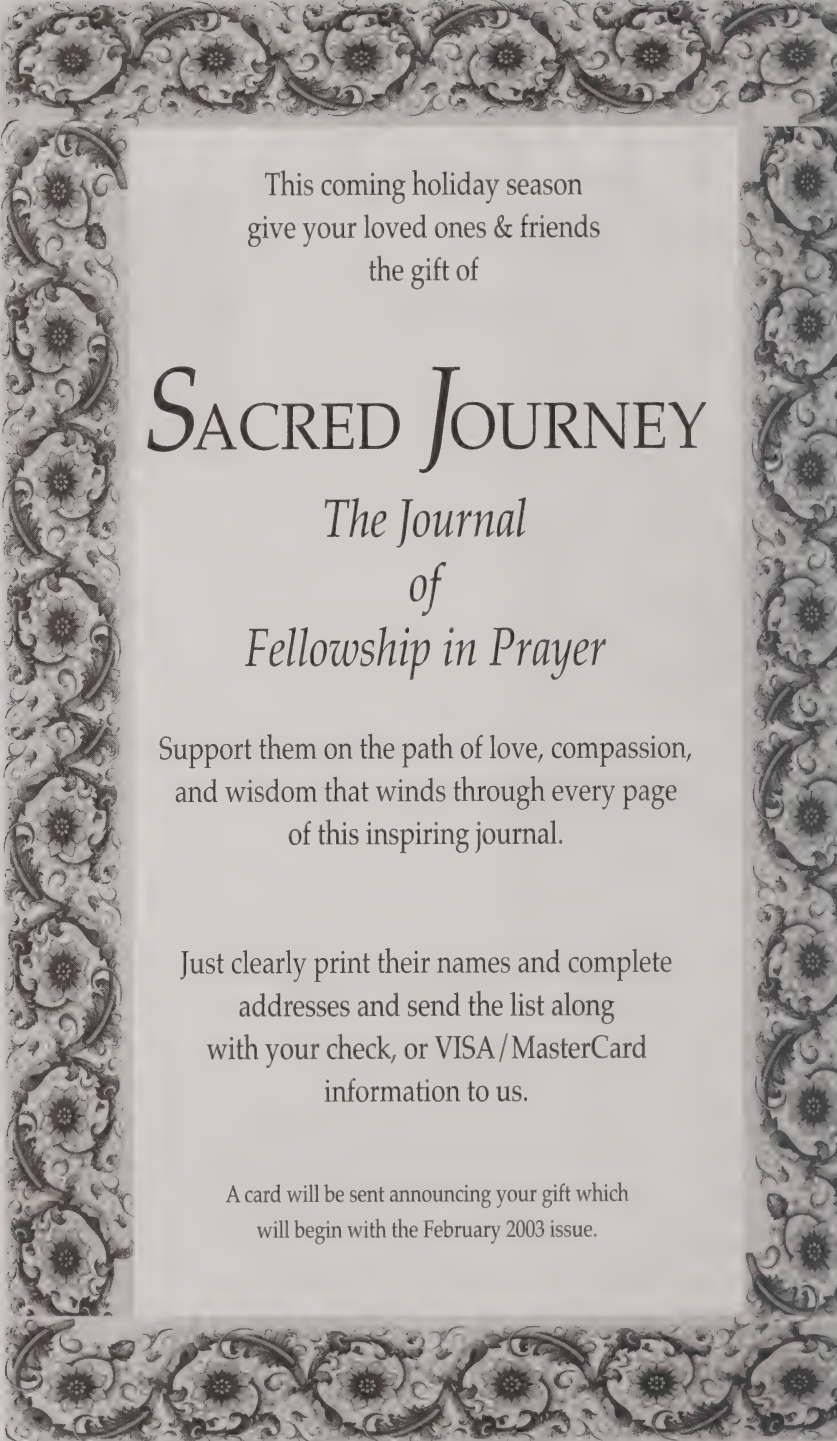
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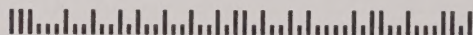
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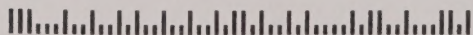
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## Vol. 53, No. 6

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ISSN 1096-5939

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